ARCHAEOLOGY PAPERS

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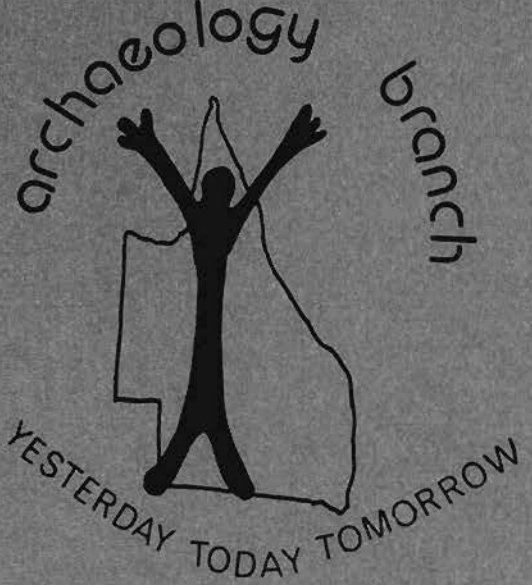

NO.17

CULTURAL TOURISM AND THE WILDERNESS

Introduction:

The decade of the 80's will see a rebirth. What we have called archaeological sites and perhaps thought of as specimens or remnants of a culture that has passed will assume a new and valid form. No doubt the protection that a museum mentality has given them at least provided us with a legacy, but this legacy of material things is likely to spring into life again.

Perhaps European Australians are becoming more mature. They have fought their pioneering battles and no longer regard themselves as settlers in an alien land and for this reason are ready to see our past as pre-dating the arrival of the First Fleet and to accept our role in the natural environment of the continent we inhabit.

It seems that the material products of Aboriginal belief and technology are no longer accepted as things apart, to be placed in glass cases or otherwise divorced from us, but are becoming part, and a vital part, of our sense of continuity and our Australian identity.

The term Cultural Tourism that has been applied to the programme and seeks to meet these emergent needs within our community is in some ways self explanatory. It uses the word 'culture' to describe what we can see of the way in which Aboriginal Australians coaxed a living and a belief from our environment while 'tourism' is simply descriptive of going to look and to learn something of the resources that we possess as the visible links with the past.

In the context of this paper the resource relates to the material evidence of the traditional Aboriginal way of life spanning a period of over 40,000 years. The 'resource' ranges from magnificent ochre paintings to functional canoe trees and it provides a record of habitation, survival and achievement that exemplifies the process of human endeavour. When initiating protective legislation in 1967, in the eyes of the Government the role of archaeology was not only to investigate and preserve the Aboriginal cultural heritage for scientific purposes, but also to utilise that cultural record to effect changes in community attitudes towards Aborigines.

The public holds many a stereotyped and inaccurate view of the Aboriginal people and their culture. By documenting and holding up before the community the breadth and diversity of Aboriginal life for 40,000 years, an increasing degree of rationality is injected into race relations and a genuine appreciation and understanding of cultural difference may evolve.

This then is the social background to archaeology in Queensland - in brief its objective is to enhance and accelerate social cohesion.

Archaeology can benefit society in other ways. Knowledge received from scientific and archaeological studies of man over many thousands of years give to modern society a sense of continuity - a 'yesterday' from which we derive the body of our cultural and spiritual responses. The past is the base from which all men operate and without roots and antecedents we drift with the tide.

Archaeological studies place man within his environmental and chronological context and as such he can be viewed in proper perspective - as a link in the historic chain and as an agent or catalyst of change.

Bearing in mind the social and cultural implications of these studies and the preservation of the cultural resource, it will be easily seen that the main thrust in the protection of the resource must be in the field of community education. For without an informed public, any protection afforded Aboriginal cultural remains will be in material terms only and not expressed in public support and positive community attitudes.

From this need to educate the public and meet legislative responsibility the Cultural Tourism programme evolved.

A major aspect of the Cultural Tourism programme will rest in emphasising man's relationship to his environment and to other men through Time and to bring home to the public the image of man in perspective rather than man or his culture viewed in isolation.

However, one of our main responsibilities today is to place man within a contemporary perspective - man today in the light of man yesterday. To do this man must be dissuaded from viewing himself as separated and divorced from his environment and its natural processes. This, of course, requires a conscious effort on the part of all citizens and even now most city bound Australians seem to be of the opinion that the environment has been placed there solely for their enjoyment and give little thought to other life forms dependent upon it.

In this age of rapid growth and development we must heed the warnings of the large industrial megatropolis and ensure that man is not confined to a man-made, man-oriented environment. Wilderness areas must be reserved for the future benefit of mankind and these areas should not necessarily be set aside for the purpose of human use and recreation, but for the preservation of other species and eco-systems. In effect, these areas would act as monitors to the changes wrought by man's development.

So much of the world's population today live in man-made or man-affected environments. Perhaps the greatest responsibility facing Australia with its small population is to ensure the preservation of wilderness areas and one should perhaps view this responsibility from the vantage point of international requirement rather than parochial interest.

This is not the place to question or analyse the values and philosophies of the past 20 odd years but it is intriguing to note that in less developed countries throughout South East Asia the aims and aspirations of the populus are directed towards achieving a way of life enjoyed by westerners today. Strange it is that many of the offspring of our technologically advanced society are trying to return to the rather less sophisticated, social and industrial climate from which under-developed countries are trying to struggle.

To return to the title which incorporates both a 'cultural tourism' and a 'wilderness' concept, the objectives of the Cultural Tourism programme and the establishment of wilderness areas can be seen as being linked. They are both concerned to place man within his cultural and environmental perspective so that he can view himself more clearly, from the vantage point of comparison and contrast rather than in isolation.

One of the testing grounds for the new programme will be the Laura area, inland from Cooktown.

This is the area known as "The Quinkans" in North East Queensland. It is here that an endeavour is being made to implement a Cultural Tourism Programme within a wilderness area so that the one compliments the other.

What, the layman asks, has Laura to offer?

Anyone who has stood at sunset, gazing up at the sandstone escarpments bathed in a red and orange glow will need little convincing to agree that the Laura region offers what could be one of the best scenic attractions in Queensland.

The tableland of Cretaceous and Jurassic sandstones, heavily dissected after millions of years of weathering and erosion is renown for its deep craggy gorges which provided a haven for the first inhabitants of the region over 14,000 years ago. Eroded into the escarpments are rock shelters which were occupied by the Aboriginal groups and on the floors the deep deposits are testimony to the lengthy occupation. These deposits provide invaluable evidence for the Archaeologist to reconstruct the prehistory of the region.

Upon the rock faces these early people painted the record of their passing in natural ochres and clays. The vast galleries, covered with layer upon layer of colourful paintings, have attracted considerable international attention.

For the avid botanist, zoologist, or photographer, the area provides ample opportunity to pursue particular interests. A variety of vegetation types are encountered as the visitor moves from river bank to steep gully and finally onto the flat tablelands. From the top of the escarpment, magnificent views await the visitor, with the Great Dividing Range to the south and the expanses of Cape York stretching to the north.

This area (shaded on map) was declared an Aboriginal site under the Aboriginal Relics Preservation Act in 1972 and two portions of the Declared Site were resumed for the establishment of two Reserves for the protection of Aboriginal relics in 1977.

The trustees for the two Reserves are Mr. P.J. Killoran of Brisbane and Mr. Wally O'Grady, Gordonvale. The By-Laws for the Reserves prohibit any activity which will disturb or affect the environment - no branch may be broken nor any stone o'er turned. Access to the Reserves, which still have the status of Declared Aboriginal Sites, is only allowed with the permission of the Honourable the Minister for Aboriginal and Island Affairs. The Trustees must also approve access to the Reserves.

In order to facilitate entry to the 3 galleries open to the public, the Minister has delegated his authority to the Aboriginal Ranger at Laura who is now able to grant visitors access to Split Rock and Guguyalangi on the Declared Site. Access to Giant Horse is only permitted with the aid of a guide. This restriction is necessary as the terrain is very difficult to traverse and it would be very easy for the casual visitor to become totally and completely lost.

At this stage the two Reserves are being retained as wilderness areas, and opinions on a management plan for them have been sought from a number of interested parties. However, responsibility for overall protection and management of the region rests with the Archaeology Branch of the Department of Aboriginal and Islanders Advancement and detailed plans have been set in train to impose proper controls over the many art galleries and other archaeological sites, particularly those of easy access.

The Cultural Tourism programme is discussed in detail later, but suffice to say here that the proposal involves utilising those galleries of easy access for visitation in order to preserve the Reserves areas in an unaffected state, to enable a detailed analysis of the resources on the Reserves and a proper management plan to be drawn up.

Before discussing that aspect, however, the reader should know a little of the prehistory of North East Queensland.

Archaeologists now know that man first came to this continent approximately 50,000 years ago, if not earlier. He came from the North through what is now Indonesia at the time of the Pleistocene, or Ice Age, when a land bridge existed between Cape York and New Guinea. In his migrations south, he undoubtedly would have found the gorges and shelters in the Laura area a pleasant resting place and reliable source of food. And so we could expect signs of early habitation to go back almost 50,000 years. There are many traces of Aboriginal occupation, and perhaps the most well known is the spectacular rock art.

The Laura/Cooktown region contains one of the largest bodies of prehistoric rock art in the world. The art, which includes paintings, stencils and engravings is most commonly found in the numerous rock shelters of the lower Cretaceous and Jurassic sandstones above the rivers, but shelters are also to be found beneath boulders on the talus slopes.

Many of the sites were spotted by pilot and artist Capt. P.J. Trezise, when flying the northern Cape York routes for Ansett Airlines of Australia. Capt. Trezise followed up his sightings on the ground and opened up to international viewing the art of the Laura region. Capt. Trezise has published a number of books and articles on the art galleries and the recording of the paintings.

The most obvious and recent components of Laura rock art are the large, colourful paintings of humans, animals, fish, birds and reptiles. Intermingled with the paintings are stencils of hands, feet, boomerangs, and axes. These often appear to have been deliberately superimposed over paintings.

The paintings are sufficiently distinct from the figurative art of other areas to be termed 'the Laura Painting Style'. The fact that they include horses, pigs and Europeans with rifles, shows that the practice of painting shelter walls continued until after European contact, and, Trezise suggests that the last of the art was probably done between 1920 and 1930. The antiquity of this style of painting is unknown at present, but the fact that some examples appear 'fresh' while others are so faint as to be scarcely visible, indicates a considerable time depth.

Pecked engravings also occur in many of the rock shelters in association with and often beneath paintings. Some engravings are 'fresh' in appearance, others are extremely weathered and patinated. The oldest engravings which are of bird tracks, lines and geometric shapes, are certainly older than the oldest surviving paintings.

A recent excavation at the 'Early Man' rock shelter by Dr. Andrea Rosenfeld (A.N.U.) showed that a panel of non-figurative pecked engravings continued down to the level of bedrock beneath occupation deposits. Radio Carbon dating of the deposits show that the engravings are a minimum of 13,000 years old.

Aboriginal rock art in the Laura/Cooktown area has similarities and differences to the art of adjacent regions. Around Princess Charlotte Bay approximately 120km north of Laura, rock art also includes figurative paintings and stencils, but in general, the figures are small (less than 30cm in length) and colour use is more restricted. As befits a coastal situation, many of the Princess Charlotte Bay paintings depict marine, as well as land animals including turtles, dugong, fish, sea-slugs, crayfish, humans, cassowaries, butterflies, lizards, bees and tracks. Similar rock art is found well to the north near the tip of Cape York and on Groote Eylandt (N.T.). This widespread style of rock painting has been termed "Simple Figurative".

Moving south from Laura, the figurative content of Aboriginal rock art decreases until around Townsville, it is predominantly non-figurative and includes a range of line, arcs, barred circles, 'shields' and line series. Further south in the Queensland Central Highlands, rock art is almost exclusively of stencils and a variety of painted or abraded geometric designs.

There is some evidence that there may have been significant changes in Cape York rock art over time. The earliest engravings of the Laura area are exclusively of bird tracks, circles, geometric shapes and meandering lines. The minimum age of 13,000 years for engravings at the Early Man Shelter show that this artistic 'tradition' is of Pleistocene antiquity. Later engravings include figurative (e.g. humans, weapons, fish), as well as geometric and track motifs. This does not suggest that at some stage in the sequence, figurative motifs were added to the early motif range. The date of this change is unknown at present.

Recently Leslie Maynard (A.N.U.) has summarised the evidence of sequential change in Australian rock art. She concluded that over much of the Australian continent, the earliest art emphasised geometric designs, and tracks. This was termed 'the Panaramittee Style' after the type site of Panaramittee in South Australia. In Central Australia and Tasmania (which was cut off from the Australian mainland some 11,000 years ago), this remained the dominant art type right up to the ethnographic present.

Elsewhere simple figurative designs were later added to the early motif range. At the same time the relatively homogeneous, widespread 'Panaramittee Style' was replaced by styles which were more diverse and regional in character.

It seems that the artistic sequence in Cape York can be related to general patterns of change in Australian Aboriginal art. The timing, significance and social implications of these widespread changes are still uncertain. The answers could well lie in the numerous shelters of the area.

From an analysis of the art and associated archaeological deposits, the prehistory of the region can be reconstructed. Most importantly, visitors to the rock art will be able to appreciate the information concealed within the paintings and further still, grasp the relationship of man and environment through the millenia of annual cycles.

The land of the Quinkans will be one of the first areas in which Cultural Tourism will be tested.

Of the sites already visited by the public, those that receive the greatest degree of visitation are known as Split Rock, Guguyalangi and to a lesser extent, Giant Horse.

Essentially the Cultural Tourism programme wherever it may be within the State, is designed to control and co-ordinate the number of visitors and the areas in which they travel - while at the same time creating a situation conducive to the preservation and protection of cultural remains. This will reduce the impact upon sites throughout the State and this objective is of course borne in mind when the sites are selected. In the selection of any sites for inclusion in the Cultural Tourism programme consideration is given to the number of visitors already imposing their presence upon the relics and where it is possible to utilise an already frequented site, this is done.

Other factors to be taken into account are the archaeological value or potential conservation problems and access. Funds are then chanelled into the selected sites to establish protective and in particular, educational facilities. The Cultural Tourism programme therefore becomes a definite endeavour to utilise the material culture to change and improve community attitudes, to limit and control access to sites within a region and to rationalise expenditure. In short, it involves the utilisation of the cultural resource in the best possible way to ensure its continuing protection, for by utilising 2 or 3 galleries within a region, several hundred are conserved.

The two art galleries which will receive emphasis in the Cultural Tourism programme are Split Rock and Guguyalangi. They are located relatively close together at opposite sides of a dissected tableland and the relative location of the galleries and the topography has enabled the construction of a walkway between the two, with excellent views of the tableland region to the north and south. This walk alone, which would take no more than 3 hours, opens up to the visitor excellent views over the ranges, alternating vegetation types, interesting geological formations and the rock art galleries.

The walkways between Split Rock and Guguyalangi have been sign posted so that visitors cannot become lost and informative pamphlets providing simple maps of the area to direct the new visitor are available from the Aboriginal Ranger at Laura. Educational signs have been established, along with simple seating and rubbish bins at the galleries.

Along the walkway and at the galleries wherever possible, trees, plants and other items utilised by the Aborigines have been sign posted with their usage indicated. At the time of writing this work was not quite complete, but it is anticipated that these signs will be fully established by the end of the 1980 dry season.

In order to protect the sites from unwitting damage by visitors who may wish to touch the paintings, limited structures will be placed, where necessary, to prevent easy access.

At Split Rock which receives the brunt of visitation, a parking area has been constructed and it will be semi-sealed to prevent excess dust. Educational noticeboards are being erected and will provide the visitor with background information on the prehistory of the area, descriptions of the galleries, maps and a list of behavioural "do's and don'ts". A few picnic tables have been placed at the Split Rock parking area for visitors to sit down and take a rest after the walk.

In all this "development", there is an overriding need to keep to an absolute minimum any alteration or imposition upon the natural environment. In a development such as this the galleries must be seen within their natural context in order that the art can be clearly related to features, plants and animals within the environment. If man-made structures impose to too great an extent upon the paintings this relationship cannot be seen.

Within the Australian culture this process of management and education must include not only the visible works of previous settlers but also symbolize their idea of the relationship between man and nature.

In the same vein the development of Australian culture can now be seen as a continuum extending back into the past and no longer an importation dating from 1788. Despite so much talk about a multi-cultural Australian society the ferment of assimilation and change will continue and although some people find this an unpleasant prospect, they are themselves part and parcel of it.

Man has always been dependent upon mineral and energy resources and will continue to be so, no matter how these may be exploited in the future. This dependence has existed through the millenia regardless of social change and with the aid of archaeological studies, revealing as they do the relationship of man and resources through the ages, we will be able to see this dependence in its proper perspective.

Because Australia remains one of the few natural wilderness regions, the burden of international responsibility and initiative falls heavily upon all of us. It is an exciting challenge but one for which our history has adequately prepared us.

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S. R. HAMPSON, Government Printer, Queensland—1980